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C E N T R A L I N T E L L I G E N C E A G E N C Y

Memorandum

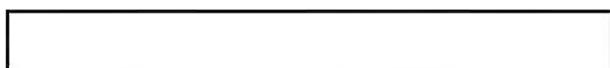


THE SITUATION IN VIETNAM

Information as of 1600
5 September 1966

State Department review
completed

PREPARED FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL
FURTHER DISSEMINATION OF INFORMATION
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HIGHLIGHTS

Despite press stories that Buddhist monk Tri Quang is near death, he was well enough on 2 September to hold a three-and-a-half hour conversation with a US official. Tri Quang was able to walk at that meeting, and the official felt that he did not appear likely to die in the near future from his fasting.

I. The Military Situation in South Vietnam: A 20-minute VC mortar attack on the 1st Air Cavalry Division's Camp Radcliff killed four and wounded 61 while hitting 77 helicopters (Para. 1). Activity in I Corps was highlighted by an engagement during Operation MACON (Paras. 2-3). II Corps was fairly quiet over the weekend (Paras. 4-5). US forces in Operation TOLEDO have uncovered numerous base camps in III Corps area (Paras. 6-7). A major battle was fought in IV Corps over the weekend resulting in some 276 Viet Cong killed in action (Paras. 8-9). VC are reported planning to infiltrate Tan Son Nhut Airfield (Para. 10). A major arms cache in Da Nang has been uncovered (Para. 11). The recently defected Viet Cong [redacted] has reported on friction in the ranks of the Vietnamese Communists (Paras. 12-13).

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II. Political Developments in South Vietnam:

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[redacted] Recent Buddhist Institute statements highlight the problems of leadership which remain unresolved (Paras. 4-5). Thich Tri Quang's health and resolve to live are still in question, although he was reported quite strong on 2 September (Paras. 6-9). The constitutional assembly elections, less than a week away, will have a base of 5,288,512 registered voters upon which to draw (Paras. 10-13).

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III. Military Developments in North Vietnam: Six US aircraft were lost over the weekend as US fighter/bombers flew more than 1,200 sorties against targets in North Vietnam (Paras. 1-2).

IV. Other Communist Military Developments: Communist China's protest that US aircraft sank a Chinese Communist freighter on 29 August raised no new threats of Chinese military counteraction (Paras. 1-2).

V. Communist Political Developments: [redacted]

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[redacted] A number of observations on life in Hanoi [redacted] (Paras. 4-5). The North Vietnamese aid mission now touring the bloc signed a free aid agreement with North Korea and has moved on to Moscow (Paras. 6-9).

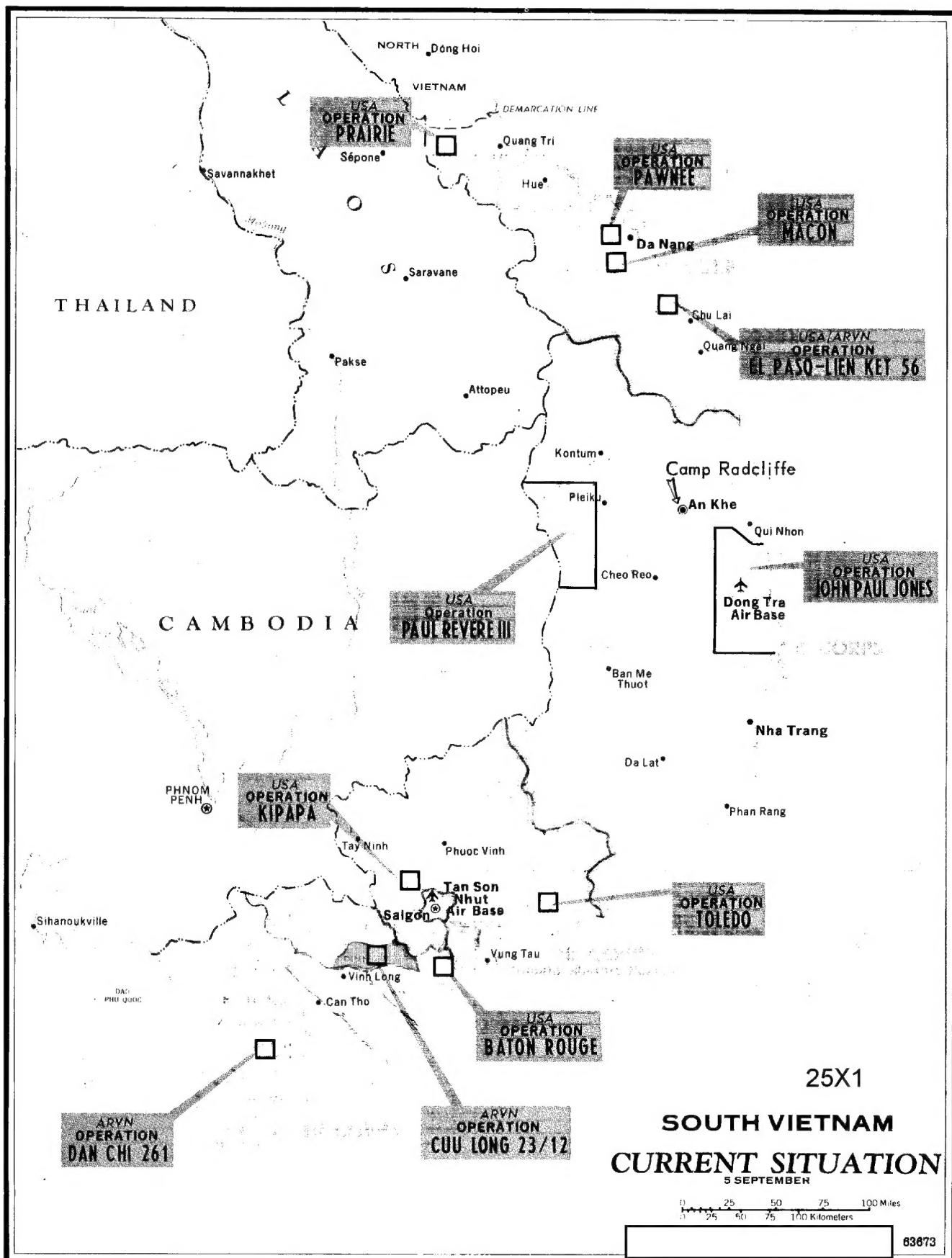
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I. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Viet Cong forces on 3 September launched a 20-minute mortar attack against the 1st Air Cavalry Division's Camp Radcliff near An Khe in the central highlands. Four US soldiers were killed and 61 wounded by the barrage. In addition, 77 helicopters were hit. Five were destroyed and 61 damaged. Forty-three of the damaged choppers will require a week or more of maintenance. The remaining 11 are considered flyable. A reaction force dispatched after the attack was unable to find the attackers.

I Corps Activity

2. The only significant activity in I Corps over the weekend occurred on 3 September during the conduct of Operation MACON. An aerial observer spotted some 50 Viet Cong in an area about 18 miles southwest of Da Nang. Artillery and air strikes were called in to support a US Marine battalion which was pursuing the VC. Results of this engagement were one marine killed and 18 wounded, as against Viet Cong casualties of 32 killed. The cumulative results of Operation MACON to date are 315 Viet Cong killed and 3 captured while US casualties stand at 19 killed and 73 wounded.

3. Three other major operations--PRAIRIE, PAWNEE (US) and POLE STAR (ROK)--continued without significant contact. In addition, a new operation, nicknamed EL PASO/LIEN KET 56, began on 4 September in an area centering about 39 miles south southeast of Da Nang. This search-and-destroy operation has a total of five battalions committed--two US and three South Vietnamese.

II Corps Activity

4. II Corps remained fairly quiet over the weekend with only one significant engagement reported on 2 September. Contact on that date in Operation JOHN PAUL JONES resulted in 20 Viet Cong

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killed, one captured and 83 suspects detained. Two US soldiers were reported killed. Cumulative results of this operation which began on 21 July and terminated on 4 September now stand at 20 US killed and 118 wounded. Enemy casualties total 262 killed, 41 captured and 391 suspects detained. In addition, some 90 crew-served and individual weapons have been captured.

5. Two other major operations under way in II Corps--PAUL REVERE III and SU BOK (ROK)--continued without significant contact. A new Operation, nicknamed SEWARD, began on 4 September in the same general area as JOHN PAUL JONES. Operation SEWARD has the mission of protecting the rice harvest in an area about 20 miles in depth along the coast from about 30 miles north to about 25 miles south of Tuy Hoa. Four US battalions will participate under the control of the 101st Airborne Division's 1st Brigade. Two North Vietnamese regiments--the 18B and the 95th --and a Viet Cong battalion are reported to be in the area with an estimated troop strength of about 4,400 men. The only other significant activity concerned elements of the 101st Airborne Division who were providing security for a South Korean base under construction. These forces engaged an unknown size enemy force some 19 miles north of Nha Trang, killing some 27 Viet Cong and capturing 27 others. US casualties were four killed and 15 wounded.

III Corps Activity

6. In Operation TOLEDO, elements of the US 173rd Airborne Brigade uncovered five base camps with numerous trenches, foxholes and bunkers in a post-B-52 strike about 35 miles east southeast of Saigon. Thus far, no enemy resistance has materialized. A quantity of weapons, food, radios and ammunition has been captured. Cumulative casualties for TOLEDO to date stand at six US soldiers killed and 35 wounded while enemy losses total 11 killed, ten captured and 24 suspects detained.

7. Two new operations have begun in III Corps areas. One search-and-destroy operation, nicknamed

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BATON ROUGE, began on 3 September about 23 miles Southeast of Saigon. The two battalions are searching for an enemy amphibious engineer battalion numbering some 400 men which is reported to be in the area. The other new search-and-destroy operation--KIPAPA--began on 30 August and was expanded on 4 September to three battalions. This operation is emphasizing the location and destruction of tunnels and fortifications in an area centered some 24 miles northwest of Saigon.

IV Corps Activity

8. One major battle was reported on 3 September when ARVN troops in Operation DAN CHI 261 engaged an estimated Viet Cong battalion about 140 miles southwest of Saigon. Results of this engagement were 18 ARVN killed and 91 wounded. The Viet Cong lost 276 killed (body count), 11 captured and 86 individual and crew-served weapons captured. Cumulative results to date for Operation DAN CHI 261 now stand at 18 ARVN killed and 91 wounded while Viet Cong casualties total 360 killed and 26 captured. Some 12 tons of arms and ammunition have also been captured, including 178 individual and crew-served weapons.

9. In Dinh Tuong Province on 4 September, elements of the ARVN 7th Division conducting Operation CUU LONG 23/12 made contact with an estimated platoon to company sized VC force. Results of the engagement were one ARVN soldier wounded while 29 VC were killed and three VC suspects taken.

Reported Threat to Tan Son Nhut Airfield

10. Two armed Viet Cong were apprehended by ARVN intelligence near Tan Son Nhut Air Base on 2 September. The captives stated they were from the Viet Cong D-30 unit and that two platoons of some 60 Viet Cong, armed with mortars and grenade launchers, were planning to infiltrate the Tan Son Nhut area in three-man teams.

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Major Arms Cache in Da Nang Uncovered

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[redacted] Da Nang security officials on 3 September confiscated a large amount of arms, ammunition and other materials from a terrorist cache in Da Nang city. [redacted]

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[redacted] disclosed the locations of several small arms caches.

Friction Reported Among Vietnamese Communists

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[redacted] confirmed that there is friction within the ranks of the Vietnamese Communists. For the most part, this friction stems from the fact that the North Vietnamese cadre were aggressive and disciplined whereas the South Vietnamese Communists were lazy.

13. [redacted] native South Vietnamese Communist cadre who had gone to North Vietnam in 1954 and had infiltrated back into the south are now regimental, divisional, and COSVN cadre. However, since their combat experience in the war against France had been limited to squad or platoon level leadership, they were unqualified for their assignments.

[redacted] if all North Vietnamese cadre were withdrawn from South Vietnam, the Communists would have to return to guerrilla warfare. However, even if North Vietnam withdrew its cadre,

[redacted] the South Vietnamese Communists would continue to fight, "because they have no choice."

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II. POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH VIETNAM

1. Elections for the constituent national assembly are less than a week off and continue to dominate most aspects of political life in the urban areas. Rural dwellers are also feeling election pressure, but primarily from the Viet Cong, who are increasingly stepping up their previously announced physical as well as political opposition to the election process.

Recent Buddhist Institute Machinations

4. Buddhist Institute leaders are still having difficulty coordinating an agreed position with respect to the elections. With Thich Tri Quang

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fasting in a private clinic, Thich Tam Chau on "sick leave," and Thich Thien Minh mending from his grenade incident, the former deputy chairmen, Thich Thien Hoa and Thich Phap Tri, have not effectively filled the leadership void. Phap Tri, the Institute representative to the antielection "Front of All Religions," was quoted during an interview with a Vietnamese correspondent as hoping that a reconciliation with the government would allow the Institute to participate in the elections.

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5. In another interview on 4 September, Thien Hoa is reported to have lashed out at the United States and the "dictatorial junta." Without clarifying the Institute position on the elections, Hoa claimed that two thirds of the candidates were backed by the military. He compared recent government actions--such as the arrest and detention of thousands of lay and clerical Buddhists and statements by GVN leaders on invading North Vietnam--to those of Hitler. Hoa claimed that the "ambitious tactics" of the Americans were turning more South Vietnamese people into Viet Cong. Hoa also labeled the Ky-Thieu government as a "puppet" of the Americans.

Thich Tri Quang

6. Assessments of Tri Quang's health and the degree of his intractability over the last few days vary as they have throughout the period of his fast, which began on 8 June. According to a press account of 5 September, he might cease his hunger strike soon at the request of the monks who initially approved it. This possibility, however, has been discounted in the latest official reports from Saigon.

7. A US official who held a three-and-a-half hour conversation with Tri Quang on 2 September found him still sustaining himself on fortified liquids and strong enough to walk. During the course of the talk, Tri Quang reiterated the pitch he made during the early days of the "struggle movement" in Hue for US support. He specifically asked for the replacement of Ky and Thieu with a provisional government, in exchange for the all-out support of the Buddhists and the Front of All Religions for the elections.

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8. Tri Quang said that he had no desire to die but that he was willing to do so if US policy did not change. The US official felt that Tri Quang did not appear likely to die in the near future from the effects of his fast. However, the official believed that the possibility of the monk's self-imposed death did exist if he should reach the point where he felt his death as a "martyr" would contribute more to the Vietnamese struggle movement.

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Election Developments

10. The final tally of persons registered to vote next Sunday is 5,288,512, which represents a 12.7 percent increase over those registered for the May, 1965 provincial elections, according to the government's Special Commissariat for Administration.

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12. Government tactics to lessen interference with the electoral process were reinforced on 29 August by the issuance of an amended decree law. Persons found guilty of interfering with the right to vote will be sentenced to a prison term or to hard labor. General Linh Quang Vien, the minister of security, in a televised interview on 3 September, outlined the GVN precautions that will be taken to safeguard the voters. According to a press report, he also empowered province, village, and hamlet chiefs to replace voter registration cards that had been stolen by the Viet Cong.

13. According to a US Embassy report, there have already been hundreds of incidents of Viet Cong terrorism directed against the elections. The embassy cited several instances of polling places that have been bombed. In Binh Duong province, for example, a group of Viet Cong exploded a mine in a voting office after they had requested information on voting procedures. Eight Vietnamese were wounded.

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III. MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH VIETNAM

1. US aircraft flew over 1,200 sorties against targets in North Vietnam over the weekend. Primary emphasis was placed on POL targets and returning pilots reported many secondary explosions and large fires. In addition, at least two surface-to-air missile sites were reported destroyed or heavily damaged.

2. Six US aircraft were lost during this period, one to a SAM, three by ground fire and two to unknown causes. These included four Air Force F-105s and an F-4C as well as a Navy F-8E. Two of the seven crew members involved in these losses were rescued, two were apparently killed when the F-4C was destroyed by a surface-to-air missile and the remainder are listed as missing in action.

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IV. OTHER COMMUNIST MILITARY DEVELOPMENTS

1. On 5 September Communist China charged that US jets sank a Chinese coastal freighter and damaged another in the Gulf of Tonkin on 29 August. Peking radio claimed that nine crew members were killed and seven others wounded in the attack. The Chinese protest concluded with the standard threat that the "blood debt must be paid in blood," and that the Chinese people, "armed with the thought of Mao Tse-tung, absolutely will not permit US imperialism to carry out any unscrupulous act." It also repeated the usual warning that "if US imperialism dares to impose war upon us," the Chinese will "completely wipe them out."

2. Chinese Communist coastal freighters move in substantial numbers between North Vietnam and south China ports, carrying much needed supplies to the Vietnamese. Many of them are armed, and they frequently fire at US aircraft. Peking's tardy response to the alleged incident reflects the pro forma character of these Chinese complaints.

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V. COMMUNIST POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

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The Situation in Hanoi

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some unspecified

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shortages exist in Hanoi, but that supplies are moving from Haiphong to the capital. There is some queuing for rationed items such as meat and rice, and [redacted] pork and poultry are very expensive. The evacuation of the city of Hanoi is moving very slowly despite pressure from the authorities. Many people leave the city during the day but return at night. One problem is the absence of accommodations in the countryside. [redacted]

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[redacted] the 17 July partial mobilization order has had no visible effect on Hanoi.

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5. The issue of the trial of American prisoners has died down. [redacted]

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[redacted] the prisoners are being well treated. They have movies and better food than the ordinary citizens. [redacted]

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[redacted] The regime is considering the provision of mail facilities [redacted]

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New Communist Aid for North Vietnam

6. Hanoi now has concluded new economic aid pacts with both Peking and Pyongyang. The North Vietnamese mission led by Le Thanh Nghi signed two economic pacts with North Korea prior to its departure on 4 September. One agreement covers the delivery of North Korean grant aid, the other an arrangement governing trade exchanges during 1967.

7. The aid talks in North Korea followed the conclusion of similar discussions in Peking last week, at which time China agreed to put assistance to North Vietnam on a grant basis. The Nghi mission arrived in Moscow on 5 September, its first stop on a tour of the Eastern European capitals, according to a Moscow press announcement.

8. The switch to grant aid reflects Communist recognition of the inability of Hanoi to finance its growing need for economic and military

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aid materials. It is likely the aid agreements also encompass deliveries formerly made under trade pacts. The inflow of bloc goods has grown during the past 18 months, but the decline in North Vietnamese exports is likely to become more severe as the North Vietnamese economy deteriorates.

9. The composition of aid also will change this year. Agreements in 1965 reflected stepped up assistance for North Vietnam's economic development plan, but the program is being de-emphasized as Hanoi increases resources devoted to reconstruction, rehabilitation, and maintenance of essential economic output and services.

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